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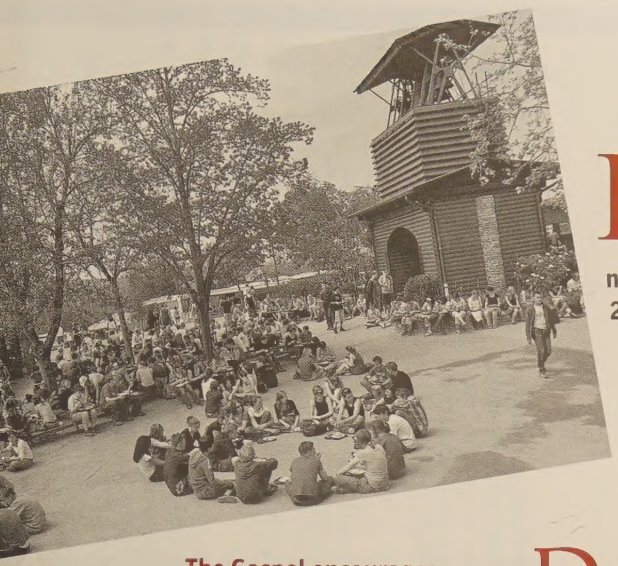

Letter from Taizé

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Desire for Forgiveness

The Gospel encourages us to go even further: justice must lead to forgiveness; human societies cannot live without it. In many parts of the world, the wounds of history are deep. So let us dare to put an end to what can end today. In that way the future of peace, prepared in the heart of God, can be fully deployed. (Brother Alois, *Letter from Chile*)

Orla (Ireland)

From my upbringing, I have been taught that forgiveness is the way forward, that as human beings we can't live without it. If one human being can't forgive another, then what hope of peace is there, for a world that desperately needs peace? I have seen forgiveness happen in my life. I have seen the ability of one to prove their love to another by forgiving them, healing a long term family rift. A frivolous argument had caused two generations to avoid all contact with one another, even when passing in the street. Once both parties had accepted their wrongdoings and agreed to forgive, the family we should have always been was created.

In May of this year, a momentous occasion occurred in Ireland. For the first time since our country became a Republic after gaining independence from the United Kingdom nearly a century ago, our president invited Queen Elizabeth II for a state visit. The objective of the historic trip was to bridge the gaps that actions by our predecessors had created, inflicting deep wounds into our culture and past, and to start a reconciliation process between two nations that have had a very painful relationship. The Queen's first public port of call was to visit the Garden of Remembrance, a memorial garden in Dublin dedicated to the memory of "all those who gave their lives in the cause of Irish freedom." For me, along with thousands of other Irish civilians, the visit to the Garden began the process of forgiveness for the many ancestors of ours who were killed fighting for our nation's freedom. I believe that the two countries are on an ongoing road to a future of peace and happiness that would never have occurred had the first steps of reconciliation and forgiveness not taken place.

Believing in God's forgiveness does not mean forgetting offenses. The message of forgiveness can never be used to condone injustice. On the contrary, believing in forgiveness makes us freer to recognize our own faults, as well as the mistakes and injustices around us and in the world. It is up to us to repair anything that can be made good. On this difficult path we find an essential support: in the communion of the Church, God's forgiveness can be granted again.

Rachael (Kenya)

When our dad died in 1991, my mum was then a housewife left with three children (7, 5 and 4 years old) to support. My father's family, who were supposed to support us, did the opposite. After my dad's burial, my father's family sat down to divide his property. This act caused a rift in our relationship and for a long time I wanted nothing to do with my father's family.

As a Christian, I was reminded that forgiveness is a command from God and how can I expect God to forgive me, when I don't forgive others. In 2008, I visited my grandparents and the desire to forgive grew in me and with time I've been able to let go of the pain. In February 2011, my grandmother died and we were able to be there as a family. Our relationship is not perfect but it will get better.

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is something we have to do. It first starts with the desire to forgive, then to make the step and forgive. However deep you may be wounded, forgiveness is a choice you make and God gives us the grace and strength to do so. Once you have forgiven, God heals your heart in his own amazing way. I have made a choice to always forgive; it is something I have to do daily, with the little offenses and the big ones too. When I forgive, I'm at peace and I know my Father in heaven also forgives me.

There are situations where we do not manage to forgive. The wound is too big. We should then remember that God's forgiveness never fails. As for us, it is sometimes only by stages that we succeed.

Tom (England)

Reconciliation does not mean forgetting what has happened in the past but it means being ready to forgive. The words of John XXIII are real today, "Let us not seek out those who were wrong and those that were right... let us just say, 'Let us be reconciled'." At the beginning of this year I spent two months in Israel where this question of reconciliation was at the forefront of my mind. How can a country divided by so many walls say, "Let us be reconciled?"

Seeking to understand can be the first step in a trusting relationship. The desire for a future together can be a sign of an

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LISTENING TO THE WORD

The Pardon of the Poor

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

This petition of the Our Father is different from all the other ones. It is not only a prayer to God, but also mentions what *we* do: "as we have forgiven" or "as we forgive." The first variant is preferred by bible scholars, the second by common practice.

Whoever prays in this way "presents themselves before God as an example of virtue, if we are allowed to put it that way, by calling upon God, who is beyond any imitation, to come and imitate them," as Saint Maximus the Confessor, a commentator of the seventh century, remarked, not without astonishment.

But who can assert that they have gone to the extreme of forgiving in order to ask God to do the same? Elsewhere, the Bible maintains the priority of forgiveness received over forgiveness given: "The Lord has forgiven you; do the same in your turn" (Colossians 3:13). The immense love with which God fills us can overflow into the lives of others through the forgiveness we offer in our turn.

Why then does the Our Father invert the order: first us, then God? The words must be taken literally: "to forgive debts" means to become poor. If forgiveness means wiping out debts, then it is first of all a loss.

In the Letter to the Colossians, forgiveness is expressed by a word which designates an undeserved and overflowing gift: "The Lord has shown grace to you." The word Jesus generally uses for forgiveness is poor and banal. It means "to let," as in "let that alone" or "let it go."

In praying "forgive us our debts," we ask God to "let go" of the debts that burden us, and so to "let us go" free ourselves. Like poor people, we ask God not to demand anything of us since in fact we have nothing to give to him.

It is not in our power to free our past from the evil we have undergone. In that too we are poor: we cannot readily cease to feel again and again the sometimes violent pain of the evil that was done to us.

Saying to God "as we have forgiven our debtors" does not mean saying proudly to him: "You see how generously I have forgiven." It only means coming to God as poor men and women who no longer wish to demand what is due to them.

For there are times when we secretly keep score of the wrongs done to us, so that, when the time comes, we can present a kind of bill for damages, with interest. Even when it seems to reassure us, this kind of score-keeping paralyzes us. To enter into the freedom of forgiveness, we have to leave behind what only makes us sad.

- What makes forgiveness hard for me?
- Are there things I cannot simply let go of? What then can I do?
- Am I ready to become poor to find the liberty and the joy of pardon?

A PORTRAIT

Suzanne de Dietrich

A note in the Letter from Chile *reproduces a text from Suzanne de Dietrich (1891-1981). Born in Alsace to a Protestant family, she turned to theology after having studied engineering in Switzerland. Her interests centered around two poles: helping ordinary Christians to read the Bible, and working with the least fortunate members of society, notably disaster victims and displaced people. To this end, in 1939 she helped to create the CIMADE, a non-governmental organization working with uprooted people, both through evangelization and social assistance. Active in the ecumenical movement from the very beginning, early on she made the acquaintance of Brother Roger and the burgeoning Taizé Community.*

In his final book, Brother Roger described an intuition of Suzanne de Dietrich which was of great significance for the history of Taizé:

From the beginnings of our community, we were aware of the hesitations that could arise in us, those times when the "yes" and the "no" clash. And we asked ourselves: how are we going to persevere in the call that God addresses to us?

I wrote a text about our searching, and I cannot forget a conversation I had with a woman who had read it. I had a lot of esteem for her. Disabled from birth, she was a writer and had extensive knowledge of the New Testament. She asked me: "Are you afraid you will not be able to persevere? But the Holy Spirit is present, and the Spirit is strong enough to support a vocation for an entire lifetime."

Gradually, my brothers and I realized that the Holy Spirit was always present and would lead us on the way. And it became evident that in order to remain faithful we had to commit ourselves for our whole lives. (*Glimmers of Happiness*, 2007)

The somber pre-war years led Suzanne de Dietrich to try and understand more deeply the significance of the Cross of Christ and its relationship to forgiveness. She emphasized especially the free gift of God's love and the difficulty for human beings to accept such an

JANUARY

DAILY READINGS

In your company, Risen Jesus, we find the clear flowing waters, as well as the energies of love to follow you until the very end of our life.

1 Lk 2:16-21
SUN When they had seen the child Jesus in the manger, the shepherds made known what they had been told concerning him and everyone who heard was astonished. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

2 1 Jn 5:18-21
Mon We are in the One who is true, as we are in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

3 Lk 1:67-79
Tue Zechariah prophesied: Blessed be the Lord, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and established for us a power of salvation, as he said through his holy prophets of long ago.

4 Ep 3:2-6
Wed Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.

5 Dt 31:1-8
Thu The Lord your God walks with you. God will never leave you or forsake you.

6 Rv 21:22-27
Fri EPIPHANY
The nations will walk in the light of Christ, and the kings of the earth will bring their treasure to the city of God.

7 Ps 146
Sat Happy are they whose trust is in God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever. God gives justice to the oppressed, gives food to the hungry; the Lord sets the prisoners free.

8 Mt 2:1-12
SUN When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

9 Am 5:4,24
Mon God says: Seek me and you shall live. Let justice flow like water, and righteousness like an unfailing stream.

10 Jn 6:67-69
Tue Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

11 Ps 139
Wed Fathom me, God, and know my heart. Test me, know my thoughts and guide me in the way that is everlasting.

12 Is 64:3-7
Thu Lord, you come to the help of those who gladly do right. Keeping your ways reminds them of you.

13 Jn 1:29-34
Fri John the Baptist said of Jesus: After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.

14 Ep 1:3-10
Sat Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every kind of spiritual blessing.

15 Jn 1:35-42
SUN Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

16 Mk 3:13-19
Mon Jesus called to himself those he wanted, and he appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out evil spirits.

17 2 Th 3:1-5
Tue God is faithful, he will give you strength and protect you from the evil one.

18 Jn 9:1-41
Wed Jesus said to his disciples: We must do the work of the one who sent me while the daylight lasts. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

19 Rv 1:1-8
Thu Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the First-born from among the dead. He loves us and has washed away our sins.

20 Ep 2:1-10
Fri When we were dead in our sins, God brought us to life with Christ.

21 Is 30:18-21
Sat God longs to show you his compassion, for he is a just God. Blessed are all who hope in him!

22 Mk 1:12-15
SUN Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God. "The time has come," he said, "the kingdom of God is at hand. Turn to God and believe in the good news of the Gospel."

23 Ezk 20:40-44
Mon God says to his people: I shall gather you from all the nations where you have been scattered. Through you, I shall display my holiness for all nations to see.

24 1 P 1:22-25
Tue Peter writes: You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

25 Mk 10:2-16
Wed Jesus said: Let the little children come to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

26 Lk 1:46-55
Thu Mary said: My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

27 2 Co 8:1-4
Fri Paul writes of the first Christian communities: Throughout ordeals of hardship, their unfailing joy and extreme poverty overflowed in rich generosity.

28 1 K 19:9-13
Sat On Mount Sinai, Elijah heard God's voice in a breath of silence.

29 Mk 1:21-28
SUN Jesus taught in the synagogue. And his teaching made a deep impression on the people because, unlike the scribes, he spoke with authority.

30 Is 44:1-4
Mon The Lord says: Do not be afraid, my servant whom I have chosen. I shall pour out my Spirit on your offspring.

31 1 P 5:5-11
Tue Resist the tempter, standing firm in the faith, because you know that it is the same kind of suffering that the community of believers throughout the world is undergoing.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Christ of compassion, again and again you enable us to realize that if faith, hope and love sustain our existence, it is living love that matters above all else.

FEBRUARY

DAILY READINGS

1 2 Co 3:1-6
Wed Paul writes to the Corinthians: You are a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

2 Lk 2:22-32
Thu PRESENTATION OF THE LORD Simeon took the child Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples — a light to enlighten the nations.

3 Mt 6:7-15
Fri Jesus said: If you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours.

4 Ezk 18:21-32
Sat The Lord says: I take no pleasure in the death of anyone. Turn to me and live!

5 Mk 1:29-39
SUN Very early, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed. When the disciples found him, he said to them, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also."

6 Is 45:18-19
Mon The Lord says: I did not tell my people to search for me in chaos. I am the Lord God, who proclaims justice, who speaks what is true.

7 Ph 3:12-21
Tue Paul writes: I do not consider that I have already made it, but forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal.

8 1 Co 3:9b-17
Wed Paul writes: You are God's building. By the grace of God which was given to me, I laid the foundations and someone else is building on them. Now each person must be careful how they do the building. For nobody can lay down any other foundation than the one which is there already, namely Jesus Christ.

9 2 Co 4:16—5:10
Thu We do not fix our eyes on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

10 Jn 13:1-15
Fri During the last meal with his disciples, Jesus said to them, "If I, who am Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."

11 Rv 7:9-17
Sat John writes: I looked and saw a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, people and language. And they all fell down and worshipped God.

12 Mk 1:40-45
SUN A leper came to Jesus and said, "If you are willing, you can cleanse me." Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!"

13 Ps 130
Mon If you, Lord, remember all our sins, who could survive? But with you there is forgiveness; I adore you and hope in you.

14 Jn 8:28-36
Tue Jesus said: I do nothing of myself, but I say what the Father has taught me, and the one who sent me is with me.

15 Is 41:14-20
Wed The Lord says: When the oppressed and needy search for water and there is none, I the Lord will answer them. I shall not forsake them. I will open rivers upon the barren heights and fountains in the valleys.

16 1 Co 1:1-9
Thu Paul writes: I continually give thanks to God for you, because of the love he has given you in Christ Jesus.

17 Ps 145
Fri God is trustworthy in all his words and loving in all he does. God supports those who stumble and lifts up those who are bowed down.

18 Jr 32:37-41
Sat The Lord says: They will be my people and I shall be their God. I shall not cease to do good to them. I shall fill their hearts with faithfulness towards me so that they never turn away from me again.

19 Mk 2:1-12
SUN Four people came, bringing a paralysed man, and they lowered the mat on which he lay in front of Jesus. Jesus, when he saw their faith, said to the paralysed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." Then he said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and go to your home."

20 Pr 3:21-31
Mon God will be your confidence and will keep your feet from being snared.

21 Jr 31:23-25
Tue The Lord says: I shall give in abundance to the weary and fill those whose strength has gone.

22 Jl 2:12-13
Wed ASH WEDNESDAY The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Come back to the Lord your God who is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.

23 Jn 15:9-17
Thu Jesus said to his disciples: You did not choose me. No, I chose you.

24 Ps 51
Fri Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

25 Lk 5:29-32
Sat Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

26 Mk 1:1-15
SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

27 Ws 7:22—8:1
Mon God's wisdom is a reflection of the eternal light, an untarnished mirror of his active power and image of his goodness.

28 Is 50:4-9
Tue God wakens my ear every morning to listen as a disciple.

29 Rm 1:8-17
Wed Paul writes: The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who has faith.

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MARCH

DAILY READINGS

1 1 Th 5:12-22
Thu See that people do not pay back evil for evil, but always seek what is good, both among yourselves and for others.

2 Mk 10:2-16
Fri Jesus said: In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

3 Ps 94:14-22
Sat When I say, "I am slipping," your faithful love, Lord, supports me.

4 Mk 9:2-10
SUN Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

5 Dn 3:41-43 (A:18-20)
Mon We now put all our heart into following you, God, and seeking your face. Rescue us in accordance with your wonderful deeds.

6 Ep 3:7-13
Tue Through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God is at work according to the plan he had from all eternity in Christ Jesus.

7 1 P 1:22-25
Wed Peter writes: The Word of the Lord remains for ever. And this Word is the Good News that has been brought to you.

8 Rm 14:7-15
Thu While we live, as when we die, we belong to the Lord. For Christ died and returned to life that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

9 Mt 19:27-29
Fri Jesus said: Anyone who leaves everything for my sake will receive much more and will inherit eternal life.

10 Ph 2:12-18
Sat Paul writes: God works in you to will and act according to his good purpose so that you may become children of God with your light shining out like stars in the midst of the world.

11 1 Co 1:22-25
SUN We proclaim Christ crucified, which to the nations is foolishness, but to those whom God has called it is Christ, the strength and the wisdom of God.

12 Jn 1:1-18
Mon The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

13 1 Co 2:1-5
Tue Paul writes: I did not come among you with eloquence or wise arguments to announce the mystery of God. I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ crucified, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

14 Col 2:16-23
Wed Paul writes: Exterior rules are only the shadow of what is to come: the reality is the body of Christ.

15 Ep 1:3-14
Thu In Christ you have heard the word of truth and the good news of your salvation. And having put your trust in it, you have received the mark of the Holy Spirit.

16 Rm 6:4-11
Fri Paul writes: We believe that if we died with Christ then we shall live with him too.

17 Is 51:12-16
Sat The Lord says: I am the one who comforts you. Why then be afraid of mortal beings?

18 Jn 3:14-21
SUN God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him. No one who believes in him will be judged.

19 Mt 1:18-24
Mon St JOSEPH An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

20 Lk 11:33-36
Tue Jesus said: No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden. Rather, they put it on a lamp-stand so that those who enter may see the light.

21 Tt 2:11-14
Wed Christ Jesus gave his life for us in order to redeem us from our faults and to purify a people to be his very own.

22 Ga 4:1-7
Thu God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father!"

23 Lk 18:18-23
Fri Jesus told someone: You lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.

24 Is 57:14-19
Sat The Lord says: I have seen my people's rebellious ways, but I shall heal and comfort them.

25 Jn 12:23-26
SUN Jesus said: Anyone who is too attached to their own life will lose it, while anyone who is not attached to their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

26 Jr 33:1-3
Mon The Lord says: Call me and I shall answer you, and tell you great and unsearchable things of which you know nothing.

27 Jn 12:37-50
Tue Jesus said: Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me.

28 Ps 33
Wed The Lord watches over those who rely on his love, to keep them alive in time of famine.

29 Mk 1:16-20
Thu As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people."

30 Rm 13:8-10
Fri St. Paul writes: Love does no harm to one's neighbour, and so love is the fulfilment of the Law.

31 Lk 6:36-38
Sat Jesus said: Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged.

Holy Spirit, in a breath of silence you tell us: "Fear nothing; God is going to take care of your future. Seek and you will find."

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APRIL

DAILY READINGS

1 Zc 9:9-10
SUN PALM SUNDAY
Cry out and rejoice, for your king is approaching. He is just and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey.

2 Rm 8:31-39
Mon St. Paul writes: I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

3 Lk 22:39-46
Tue When they reached the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to his disciples: Pray, so as not to fall into temptation.

4 2 Co 1:8-11
Wed Paul writes: When overburdened to the point of despair, we learnt to rely, not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead to life.

5 Jn 16:20-22
Thu Before his passion, Jesus said to his disciples: Now you are sad, but I shall see you again and your hearts will be full of joy. And that joy no one shall take from you.

6 Jn 19:23-37
Fri GOOD FRIDAY
Scripture says of Christ: They will look on the one they have pierced.

7 1 P 3:18-22
Sat Christ was put to death in the body and raised to life in the Spirit. And in the Spirit he also went to announce the Gospel to those who once had refused to believe.

8 Lk 24:1-8
SUN EASTER DAY
At the empty tomb, the women were met by two angels who said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

9 1 Jn 3:11-16
Mon John writes: We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters.

10 Rm 5:1-11
Tue The proof that God loves us is this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been reconciled to God by Christ's death, how much more shall we be saved by his life!

11 2 Co 4:8-12
Wed Paul writes: We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; we see no way out, but we never despair. We always carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed there too.

12 Rv 1:9-18
Thu John writes: One like a son of man, Christ, put his hand on me and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last, the Living One. I was dead and now I am alive for all time."

13 Mt 18:1-5
Fri Jesus said: Whoever makes themselves humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me.

14 Jn 5:24-27
Sat Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life; without being brought to judgement such a person has passed from death to life.

15 Jn 20:24-29
SUN Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

16 Lv 19:33-34
Mon God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

17 Ph 2:1-11
Tue Taking the nature of a servant, Christ became as human beings are. And he humbled himself still further, remaining faithful to the point of death, and death on a cross. Therefore God has exalted him, and has given him the name that is above all other names.

18 Ep 1:3-10
Wed God has let us know the mystery of his good purpose: to bring all things together under Christ as head.

19 Ep 3:1-9
Thu Paul writes: I have been entrusted with proclaiming the immeasurable treasures of Christ to the nations and making plain the plan of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God.

20 Rm 8:1-11
Fri Paul writes: The law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus, has set you free from the law of sin and death.

21 Mt 6:25-34
Sat Jesus said: Do not worry about your life. Seek first God's kingdom and his saving justice and all other things will be given to you as well.

22 Lk 24:35-48
SUN The Risen Christ opened the minds of his disciples to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus is it written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead."

23 Ph 1:1-11
Mon Paul writes: I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

24 Ps 73
Tue I stay beside you, Lord, you have grasped me by the right hand and guide me with your counsel.

25 Jn 3:1-8
Wed St MARK
Jesus said: What is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind blows where it pleases: you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with those who are born of the Spirit.

26 Lk 12:49-53
Thu Jesus said: I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already burning!

27 Ep 4:25-32
Fri Paul writes: Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

28 Si 18:8-14
Sat Human compassion extends to neighbours, but God's compassion extends to everyone.

29 Jn 10:11-15
SUN Jesus said: I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

30 Si 30:21-25
Mon Trick the cares that weigh upon you, console your heart, chase sorrow far away, for sorrow is of no use to anyone.

Risen Christ, when you ask us, as you asked your disciples: "Who am I for you?" we would like to answer: you are the one who never abandons us.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

ditional gift. A gift of that sort calls our life into ion, because it puts an end to our pretensions to be in control of our existence. Her meditations were shed in a small booklet in France in the spring of . Here is an excerpt from them:

cepting the Cross means accepting God's for- ess. It means realizing that this forgiveness is d to us; all we have to do is receive it. "Christ for us when we were still powerless," says Saint But this also means accepting to die our own , because the hardest thing for us is to accept as , undeserved gift the forgiveness offered, to rec- e that our life is so ill that only God can heal is is the mystery of conversion. Human beings nger have their center within themselves; they all their hope in the action of God.

us the Cross becomes for us the revelation of nd of forgiveness. Of sin, because it is indeed humanity that nailed him there. It is indeed goism that doesn't want Christ, that still today s against the utter generosity of the act of God, comes down to where we are to encounter us .

forgiveness, because, if he is present, if God al- d Christ to be there, "in our place," that is pre- so that our heart can give, repent and believe. e face of the Cross, the heart of the disciples and opened to love. A contemporary Catholic er liked to say about Christianity that it is a physic of generosity: "What is proper to char- e wrote, "is to become the others." That is why e charity became flesh. God became man in or- o remove the ban that lay heavy upon us and to us back to him in a movement that was true ree.

ft must respond to gift: the generosity of the le to the unlimited generosity of Christ. "This w we know what love is, because he gave his life s," writes Saint John, "and we too must give ves for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16). oice now in the sufferings I endure for you," s Saint Paul, "and I make up what is lacking in fferings of Christ in my flesh for his Body, the ch"(Col 1:24). There is no exaltation here of ring as an end in itself, but a love that responds e and gives itself in its turn without reserve.

e disciple enters into the thinking of the Mas- king part in his suffering by waging the same s as he. Jesus had announced this; the Church es it. To the very extent that the Church is ul, it will be the Church of the Cross until the f time. It makes its own the deep distress of hu- beings, the deep distress of the world.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Is it a duty to forgive?

"Peter said: Lord, if my brother or sister offends me, how many times do I have to forgive? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him: Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times." (Matthew 18:21-22)

To listen to the way Peter asks the question, forgiving seems to be a duty. And yet Jesus' answer, by its exaggeration, points things in another direction. What kind of duty would we have to accomplish seventy-seven times? If the number seven in Biblical times stood for fullness or completion, what about seventy-seven, then? Fullness squared? In other words, infinity.

How many times do I have to forgive? Endlessly, Jesus answers quietly. Now, there is no duty which is unending. Every task has a goal and an end. If forgiving has no end, then it is more than a task, more than a duty.

Or perhaps it is a duty in the same way as the cross is a "duty" for the Son of Man: "The Son of Man," said Jesus, "*has to* be handed over into the power of sinners, be crucified and rise on the third day"(Luke 24:7). This duty is not a commandment or an order from the outside. How could a loving father order his son to die? This duty is a conviction discovered in oneself that takes the Gospel to its most extreme consequences. With this same conviction, Jesus says to Zacchaeus: "Come down quickly, for today I *have to* stay with you" (Luke 19:5). Paul uses the same verb to interpret Jesus' death on the cross: "He *has to* reign until he sets all his enemies under his feet.... And the final enemy is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). This "to have to" is not on the level of respect for the law; it is a matter of obedience to an inner impulse, the presence of the Spirit who opens our hearts to the fullest possible degree.

In his discourse to the crowds on the mountain (Matthew 5–7), Jesus points out that the Law indicates limits by formulating them negatively: "You will not kill, you will not commit adultery...." When he interprets this Law, Jesus gives positive encouragement: "Love your enemies, do good to those who mistreat you...." The Law is only fulfilled to the extent that we go beyond it (see Matthew 5:20). That is what is at stake: going further than the Law requires in order to identify ourselves with the Father's image of us, daring to conform to that exigency of love and responsibility that makes us fully human. "Be perfect—in love—as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

The "have to" of forgiveness is a "have to" that aims at fullness, at perfection. We forgive because we want nothing to separate us from the Reign of God that is already shining on our faces. Forgiveness is resurrection, transfiguration, new creation, and it is a great joy to be a part of that creation.

oasis of hope in a vast desert of division. We do not need to search for quick solutions but for long-lasting realities that can sustain the future for all involved.

Can we look to the peace of the Risen Christ in great nights of conflict? The reconciliation that Christ shows is one that bears the wounds of the past but is not totally defined by them. He beckons us forward in awakening a trusting communion which creates new possibilities of living together.

This is the true "Shalom" of God. For it is a peace that every human heart can know. This peace is a shared encounter. When we share this peace with those entrusted to us then walls crumble to dust. Forgiveness transmits this peace, even when all seems lost. Can Israel and Palestine be open to this peace? Do not forget the past, bear the wounds, but look to this new life that can flow when forgiveness is made real. Peace can be encountered even when doors seem locked (John 20:26).

The desire to forgive is already a first step, even when that desire remains engulfed in bitterness. By forgiving, God does more than wipe away the offense. He gives a new life in his friendship, rekindled day and night by the Holy Spirit.

Lorenz (Germany)

"I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud," God says in Isaiah 44:22. At the end of 2010, several young people from different European countries taking part in the Rotterdam meeting were sitting in the Maria van Jesse Kerk in Delft, reflecting about what God calls us to do by his forgiveness.

We understood these words as an encouragement to forgive as he does. "But in some cases forgiveness is really difficult," admits Hendrikje from Germany. "Where is the limit?" "I believe that God can forgive everything, because he knows the reasons for our behaviour; our past, our backgrounds, our environment...," I answer. "We have to ask God for forgiveness again and again," emphasizes Thomas from the Netherlands. "That is why you cannot abuse his mercy; even if we sin we have to trust in a God who forgives us anyway."

And what about the cloud swept away? "God can forgive, but he doesn't forget," states Ruben, also from Germany. This reminds me of the fact that the water which is the substance of a cloud never disappears, but only turns into another form. "We should try to forgive as God does, even if something is unforgettable," Thomas sums up. Susanna (Germany) quotes from Brother Alois' letter: "'The desire to forgive is already a first step.' This is a helpful thought."

During the prayers with tens of thousands of people from different cultural and confessional backgrounds, our desire to forgive our neighbour's human imperfection was expressed in an amazing way. Let's keep this readiness alive – also after Rotterdam!

And we can all make this discovery: forgiveness received or extended creates joy. Knowing that one is forgiven is perhaps one of the deepest, most liberating of joys. It is the source of the inner peace that Christ wants to communicate to us. That peace will lead us far; it will radiate outwards for others and for the world.

Aimé (Ivory Coast)

From 2002 up until the beginning of 2011, my country underwent a political crisis which led to the displacement of populations, with loss of human life and material belongings. I followed the crisis from France; it saddened me to witness the suffering and division of the Ivory Coast.

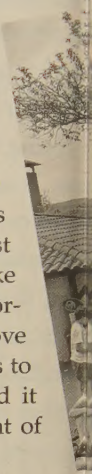
On the occasion of my visit to the Ivory Coast in July 2011, three months after the end of the crisis, it was a joy to notice that the country was trying to come to life again. In spite of the painful wounds, people are enlivened with exuberance and hope for a future of peace. Relations between friends, neighbors, colleagues... from opposite sides began to become warmer, little by little.

It would be a delusion, however, to think that the page has turned so quickly, because the wounds remain present. The time will come when the wounds will need dressing and forgiveness. The victims, on both sides, are awaiting justice, a fair justice and not a justice of the victors, which seems to me to be the first factor of reconciliation.

While being aware of difficulties that need to be overcome, the exuberance which enlivens the Ivory Coast and people's wish to rebuild their life makes me hope in a future of peace. This hope is supported by my Christian creed which teaches me that forgiveness and peace find their source in God. The Lord can help the Ivory Coast advance on this way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

When we pray in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive...," God's forgiveness already touches us. They are not empty words: something happens when we pray using those words which Jesus himself taught us. And then we are ready to forgive in our turn, and not condemn another person definitively when we have been wronged.

Abraham (India)



Forgiveness and the love of God are two terms which are often complementary to me. While reciting the Lord's Prayer, in the statement, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," the term, "as" used to make me think. Jesus requests us to forgive others, due to his immense love towards us. He never limited this to his words but also demonstrated it through his life; at every moment of his existence.

At a critical moment in my life, at the verge of loneliness and sadness, God's love which I had always neglected came to me through the Word of God. God came to me through the verse in the Bible, "you are beloved for me," which made me feel a sense of failure in front of his love and forgiveness. Recently during a week of silence, God made me realize the depth of his love towards us and how everyone including me, is running away from this love. The entire life of an individual may not be adequate enough to have the fullest understanding of this love. And I feel that it is through forgiveness that we can spread the Love of Jesus, our Lord.

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